



## Chofni and Pinchas: A Deplorable Duo

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Dedicated by Jeffrey Silver in appreciation of Ezer Diena for being such a great chavruta and for all he does for the BAYT

### 1. Selections from Shmuel I Chapters 2:11-4:22, Page 648-655 in the Artscroll Stone Tanach

#### 2. Radak to Shmuel I 2:12

בני בליעל – בני רשע, ובדרש בנים שבלו שם שמים מעליהם אמרו אין מלכות בשמים וזהו שאמר לא ידעו את ה' או פירושו לא ידעו את ה' לא היו יודעים דרך ה' שהיו עושים מעשה רשע בכהונתם כמו שמספר והולך מה היו עושים.

“Sons of Beliya'al” – evil sons, and in a midrash, sons who wore out the name of heaven from on themselves, as they said “there is no kingdom in heaven”, and this is what the [verse] said: “They did not know G-d”.

Alternatively, “They did not know G-d” may mean that they did not know the way of G-d, that they did evil deeds in their priesthood, as the narration continues to tell us what they did.

#### 3. Devarim 13:14, Page 460-463 in the Artscroll Stone Tanach

#### 4. Shoftim 19:22, Page 634-635 in the Artscroll Stone Tanach

#### 5. Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 55b (Davidson Edition Translation)

אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר רבי יונתן כל האומר בני עלי חטאו אינו אלא טועה שנאמר ושם בני עלי (עם ארון ברית האלהים) חפני ופנחס כהנים לה' סבר לה כרב דאמר רב פנחס לא חטא מקיש חפני לפנחס מה פנחס לא חטא אף חפני לא חטא אלא מה אני מקיים אשר ישכבן את הנשים מתוך ששהו את קיניהן שלא הלכו אצל בעליהן מעלה עליהן הכתוב כאילו שכבום

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said that Rabbi Yonatan said: Anyone who says that the sons of Eli sinned is nothing other than mistaken, as it is written: “And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Pinehas, were there priests of the Lord” (I Samuel 1:3). The Gemara explains: Rabbi Yonatan holds in accordance with the opinion of Rav, as Rav said: Pinehas did not sin. And the verse juxtaposes Hophni to Pinehas; just as Pinehas did not sin, so too Hophni did not sin. The Gemara asks: How, then, do I establish the meaning of the verse: “Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did to all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the Tent of Meeting” (I Samuel 2:22), which indicates otherwise? The Gemara answers: Since the sons of Eli delayed sacrificing the bird-offerings of women who had given birth, a pair of doves brought as part of the purification process, and this delay caused the women not to go to their husbands in timely fashion, the verse ascribes to Hophni and Pinehas liability as if they had lain with them. They were guilty of nothing more than negligence and carelessness.

#### 6. Talmud Bavli, Yoma 9a-b (Davidson Edition Translation)

א"ר יוחנן בן תורתא מפני מה חרבה שילה מפני שהיו בה שני דברים גלוי עריות ובזיון קדשים גלוי עריות דכתיב (שמואל א ב, כב) ועלי זקן מאד ושמע את כל אשר יעשו בניו לכל ישראל ואת אשר ישכבון את הנשים הצובאות פתח אהל מועד ואע"ג דאמר ר' שמואל בר נחמני א"ר יוחנן כל האומר בני עלי חטאו אינו אלא טועה מתוך ששהו את קיניהן מיהא מעלה עליהן הכתוב כאילו שכבום

§ Apropos the sins of the High Priests in the Second Temple, the Gemara cites that Rabbi Yohanan ben Torta said: Due to what reason was the Tabernacle in Shiloh destroyed in the time of the prophet Samuel? It was destroyed due to the fact that there were two matters that existed in the Tabernacle: Forbidden sexual relations and degradation of consecrated items. There were forbidden sexual relations, as it is written: “Now Eli was very old and he heard what his sons were doing to all of Israel, how they lay with the women who did service at the opening of the Tent of Meeting” (I Samuel 2:22). And although Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said that Rabbi Yohanan said: Anyone who says that the sons of Eli sinned by engaging in forbidden sexual relations is nothing other than mistaken, even according to the alternative interpretation of the verse that it was due to the fact that

they deferred the sacrifice of their bird-offerings by women after childbirth; nevertheless, the verse ascribes to them as if they lay with them. These women came to the Tabernacle to sacrifice doves or pigeons as bird-offerings as part of their purification process, which would permit them to engage in sexual relations with their husbands. Eli's sons delayed the sacrifice of these offerings and thereby delayed the return of these women to their husbands and their fulfillment of the mitzva of procreation. Even though, according to this opinion, Eli's sons did not actually engage in sexual relations with these women, the verse attributes that degree of severity to their conduct.

**7. Rav Amnon Bazak, <https://etzion.org.il/en/shiur-11b-sins-biblical-figures-part-2-4>, (Kaeren Fish translation)**

This is a strange midrash. Thus far we have seen that there is a tendency to defend biblical figures against accusations that they sinned, even when such defense goes against the plain meaning of the text, but what sort of "interest" is there in defending Chofni and Pinchas, who are characterized quite plainly in the text as "worthless men" (benei beliya'al) (2:12), and whose actions are recorded in great detail?

**8. Rashi to Shmuel I 3:13 (Alhatorah translation)**

כי מקללים להם בניו – מקללים 'לי' היה לו לומר, אלא שכנה הכתוב.  
מקללים – מקילים, וכן כל קללה, לשון קלות ובזיון הוא.  
ולא כהה – לא הכהה פניהם להעבירם מגדולתן.

That his sons were blaspheming themselves. It should properly state, 'blaspheming Me' but Scripture euphemized.

Blaspheming. Meaning, acting irreverently, and similarly, every curse is an expression of irreverence and disgrace.

He did not censure. I.e., he did not darken their faces by removing them from their high positions.

**9. Ralbag to Shmuel I 3:13**

מקללים להם בניו ולא כהה בהם – הרצון בזה שהוא ידע שישראל היו מקללים בניו בסבת העושה שהיו עושקים אותם בית עלי ממה שהיו חוטפים מהם מן הזבחים ובעבור העצלה שהיתה בהם מהקרבת הקרבנות אשר הובאו להם...

“His sons were bringing a curse upon themselves, and he did not rebuke them” – The meaning of this is that he [Eli] knew that the Israelites were cursing his sons because of the extortion that [they] committed, by snatching for themselves from the sacrifices, and for the laziness that they exhibited in [not] bringing the sacrifices that were brought to them...